

MEMORANDUM

February 10, 2009

To: Montgomery County Council

From: Kate Garvey and Janine Bacquie, Co-Chairs
Montgomery County Universal Preschool Implementation Work
Group

Subject: Update on Work Group Progress and Status

This memorandum summarizes the work to date of the Montgomery County Universal Preschool Implementation Work Group (UPI Work Group) and its plans for future progress.

I. BACKGROUND

On July 22, 2008, the County Council adopted Resolution No. 16-664 establishing the UPI Work Group. The resolution establishing the Work Group is attached at ©1-2. Building on the December 2007 Preschool for All Report generated by the State Task Force on Universal Preschool Education, the County Council established the Work Group to develop recommendations for implementing a countywide program that provides all County four-year olds the opportunity to participate in a high-quality preschool, early care, and education program.

The 15 members of the UPI Work Group include parents and representatives from Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Department of Health and Human Services, MSTTA, Service Employees International Union, the local chapter of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Commission on Child Care, the Collaboration Council, the County Chamber of Commerce, higher education (Montgomery College and Universities at Shady Grove), the Organization of Child Care Directors of Montgomery County, and the Family Child Care Association of Montgomery County. A list of work group representatives is attached at ©3.

PROGRAMMATIC INFORMATION

The UPI Work Group's recommendations will address the needs of children and families and expand on existing preschool services in the County. MCPS currently estimates that there are 13,500 four year-olds living in Montgomery County.

Public funding supports early childhood education programs that include:

- MCPS Head Start: 618 students enrolled in part day and full day programs.
- Community-based Head Start: 30 students enrolled in part day programs with option for wrap around child care.
- MCPS Pre-kindergarten: 1,950 students enrolled in part day programs.
- Community-based Pre-kindergarten: 70 students enrolled in part day and full day with wrap around child care programs.

MCPS special education services are also publicly funded with services ranging from periodic therapy sessions to full day special education classes. As of October 2008, 1380 children at the pre-kindergarten level received MCPS special education services. Some of these children attend another publicly funded pre-kindergarten option as well. As special education services are federally-mandated, the number of children served increases throughout the year.

RESEARCH ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A substantial body of research supports the conclusion that early childhood education programs can produce lasting improvements in the life outcomes of children. Participants in programs like the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program¹ and the Abecedarian Project² demonstrated lower participation in special education, higher graduation rates, lower involvement in the criminal justice system, higher employment rates and higher median annual earnings than control group members who attended no preschool program.

These studies have demonstrated that the public earned back its original investment many times over in savings from lower incarceration rates, lower special education costs, increased taxes from higher earnings, and savings in public assistance costs. According to the cost benefit analysis commissioned by the Maryland Task Force on Universal Preschool Education, the State would realize a substantial return for a voluntary universal preschool program; for every dollar invested in a one-year pre-kindergarten program, the State would receive \$4.85 in net benefits.

¹ Belfield, C.R., Nores, M. Barnett, W.S. & Schweinhart, L. (2006). The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program: The cost-benefit analysis using data from the age-40 follow-up. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 41(1), 162-190.

² Barnett, W.S. & Masse, L.N. (2007) Comparative benefit-cost analysis of the Abecedarian program and its policy implications. *Economic of Education Review*, 26(1), 113-125

MARYLAND TASK FORCE ON UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

In 2006, the State General Assembly established a Task Force on Universal Preschool Education to develop a plan to increase access to high quality early childhood education opportunities. The Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002 mandated local school systems in Maryland to provide pre-kindergarten to all four-year olds from “economically disadvantaged backgrounds” by the 2007-2008 school year.

The Task Force issued a report “Preschool for All in Maryland” in December 2007 which recommended the creation of a voluntary, free, and high quality pre-kindergarten program for all four year olds regardless of family income. The Preschool for All report recommended adopting the National Institute for Early Education Research’s “Ten Quality Benchmarks for High-Quality Preschool Education” as a framework for the Maryland universal preschool program. Programs that adhere to these and state guidelines would be required to:

- Have comprehensive curriculum standards specific to pre-kindergarten and cover the domains of language/literacy, mathematics, science, social/emotional skills, cognitive development, health and physical development and social studies;
- Have lead teachers with state certification in early childhood education;
- Have assistant teachers with high school diplomas with preference for teachers with the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or equivalent training;
- Require teachers to attend approved professional development annually;
- Limit class size to no more than 20 four-year olds;
- Require at least one staff member for every 10 children in a classroom;
- Provide support services and vision, hearing, and speech and language screening and referral services;
- Offer at least one full meal per day if services are offered for more than 2.5 hours; and
- Assess program quality and report performance to MSDE.

Although the Preschool for All report recommended development of a program by 2014, State officials have since suggested that completion will likely be delayed because of the current economic recession.

Significant resources will be needed at the state and local levels to realize the vision of universal preschool. In its Preschool for All Draft Business Plan, MSDE proposes that local jurisdictions share the cost of the program with a local match of 30%. The report estimates the total cost of the program for all four-year olds statewide, including local and state shares, could be \$115 million. In developing the total cost projection, a cost per child calculation was developed that combines the base costs for operating prekindergarten classrooms and enhancement costs to meet the improved quality standards, including increased compensation for state certified teachers. Using a representative sample, the estimated cost per child at non-public facilities is \$2,700 for a half day program and \$5,300 for a full day program.

The Business Plan also clarifies that MSDE will have oversight responsibility for the Preschool for All program, which will include budgeting, grants management, monitoring, and accountability. MSDE will issue grant applications to all jurisdictions. Accredited child care centers, nursery schools, Head Start programs, family child care networks, and local school systems will be eligible to develop proposals to operate pre-kindergarten programs. A local review panel will provide county-wide coordination and review and approve applicants. Local jurisdictions will determine the membership of the review panel.

METHODOLOGY

Over the past four months, the Work Group has held a variety of meetings and solicited information from multiple sources including as follows:

- **Meetings:** The work group began meeting on September 4, 2008 and has held nine meetings.
- **Presentations:** The Work Group heard presentation from a variety of experts including representatives from MSDE, DHHS, MCPS, professional child care associations, family child care providers, center-based child care providers, public and private higher education institutions, and Preschool for All pilot sites. The complete list of presenters is attached at ©4-5.
- **Public Hearings:** At one public forum, a total of 13 speakers addressed issues related to their experiences as parents or family members, advocates, child care providers from centers, nursery schools, faith-based programs, and family child care homes. In addition to oral testimony, the Work Group received several written comments from interested individuals.
- **Parent Meetings:** Work Group members and staff attended parent meetings in the community sponsored by organizations including Centro Nia, IMPACT Silver Spring, Families Foremost, and Montgomery Child Care Association. Information was also solicited from the Head Start Parent Policy Council. It is anticipated that additional information will be provided by parents participating with the Gaithersburg and Silver Spring Judy Centers serving Summit Hall, Rosemont, Washington Grove, and Rolling Terrace Elementary Schools, as well as Learning Parties offered by DHHS.
- **Parent Survey:** The Work Group is finalizing a parent survey seeking input from parents on how a universal preschool program should be implemented. The survey will be widely disseminated in the community through networks including the Montgomery County Child Care Resource and Referral Center and Montgomery County PTAs.

II. PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The UPI Work Group has developed the following broad-based recommendations for implementing a universal preschool program in Montgomery County. These

recommendations represent the initial thinking of the group, and provide the context for further work to be performed by the group.

BUDGET AND FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

Initial

- The County should maintain funding for early childhood services including full funding of the Montgomery County Child Care Resource and Referral Center (MCCCR&RC), which provides child care provider training, licensing, accreditation, English language development, and other programs that provide similar support services. If available resources allow, increase funding to strengthen programs that have performed well.
- Maximize available funding in optimum way using public and private resources for programs. Study the use of federal, state, and local funding streams that serve the neediest preschool children.

Long term

- Additional resources beyond those outlined in the MSDE Preschool For All business plan and grant request process will be needed to implement services in Montgomery County, in the areas of universal preschool program enhancements for salary and compensation, and expansion of non-academic services to children at risk of school failure. The Work Group will assess the full costs for implementation of the program in Montgomery County.
- Funding for early childhood education services including those provided by the MCCCR&RC and other similar programs should be maintained even in times of budget deficits.
- Child care payments required of families who participate in child care subsidies programs should be limited to 10% of their income.

PROGRAM EXPANSION

Initial

- Increase capacity in areas of the County of greatest need initially with particular emphasis on full day programs with wrap around child care services. The areas of focus will have the greatest concentration of children in need as defined by multiple factors including limited family income falling outside current pre-kindergarten guidelines, English language learners, special needs students, and students currently on wait lists for services with additional consideration given to existing efforts in the County to expand preschool programming.

Long term

- Provide access to voluntary universal preschool services in a variety of settings that meets the diverse needs of children, parents, and families. The Work Group expressed interest in expanding services to all three-year olds
- Strengthen early childhood services to improve the school readiness of very young children across all developmental domains, e.g., language, literacy, physical, social, emotional and cognitive, for the full continuum of children from birth to age five.

PREPARATION OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED STAFF

Initial:

- Priority for professional development and training support should be given to providers who are working in high needs areas and are serving children who face the most significant barriers to being prepared for kindergarten and are not currently receiving services.
- Of the providers who are working in high needs areas, teachers who are the closest to becoming certified and family child care providers should receive priority for professional development and training funding. Support should be allocated proportionally based on the type of child care (i.e., family child care, center-based child care, etc.) that high needs children are likely to access.

Long Term:

- Build on the existing professional development system for early childhood providers to ensure a holistic approach to increasing the ability of providers across all levels to deliver quality preschool services. In addition to increasing accessible and affordable training opportunities, the system should provide supports that allow providers to access training opportunities, ensure sufficient outreach to make opportunities known to the provider community, and accommodate the cultural and linguistic diversity of providers. There should be a process, perhaps a circular, tiered approach, to move providers up the ladder beginning at the lowest level, to the educator beginning a 4 year degree, up to and including certified teachers.
- Operationalize the delivery of Preschool for All services by family child care or center-based providers by developing family child care networks or other models that ensure the delivery of quality programming by family child care providers.
- Encourage efforts by local higher education institutions to attract new students to the field of early childhood education and grow the pool of highly qualified staff from within the state.

ADVOCACY

Initial

- Work with State, public higher education system, and other institutions of higher education to improve the access for current early childhood workforce to participate in higher education courses, credentials, and other experience to satisfy the requirements of Preschool for All.
- Advocate with policy makers at all levels to maintain support and funding for early childhood services that support the development of young children and prepare them for school

Long Term:

- Develop a public higher education system that meets the needs of the County's early childhood workforce, includes college coursework that is flexibly scheduled (e.g., weekend or evening coursework, on-line opportunities, accelerated formats, etc.) and provides opportunities for providers to pursue four-year degrees related to early childhood education and development. The system should also address barriers related to articulation for existing course work and associate degrees and options for student teaching practica in viable settings (e.g., child care centers).
- Work with public and private entities at national, state and local levels to increase visibility and investment in early childhood education programs
- Monitor the increase in demand for preschool education services by children with high needs and advocate for resources that adequately support the needs of these children.

III. NEXT STEPS

The Work Group will continue to work on developing specific recommendations for implementing Preschool for All in Montgomery County through March 2009. Some of the next steps identified by the group include:

- Determine the schedule for expansion for pre-kindergarten classrooms that takes into account current demand, available resources, and local education agency and community provider capacity.
- Assess the available resources that can support universal preschool services. Research and pursue available grants, foundation funding, endowments, child care subsidies, and especially new federal funding initiatives generated by the incoming Obama/Biden administration.
- Assess the total cost for implementing universal preschool services in Montgomery County. Identify the extent to which federal and State projections fall short and where additional local funding, foundation support or other outside funding is needed.

- Assess and analyze the professional development services and resources needed to increase the number of qualified providers to meet the demand for services including:
 - Infrastructure: MCCR&RC staffing, mentoring, outreach, counseling, support related to program accreditation and provider credentialing, and training opportunities (e.g., pre-kindergarten curriculum, early childhood foundational, ESL, services to children with special needs, etc.)
 - Direct Aid to Providers: scholarships, funding of higher education programs, training vouchers, loan forgiveness programs, substitute stipends at program level, etc.
 - Funding to higher education institutions: support for the professional development needs of new provider cohorts and for staff who are already degreed or certified.
- Perform a needs assessment for providers who are interested in pursuing four-year degrees in early childhood education including where they are in the process, what credentials or degrees they have earned, how intensely they can pursue higher education opportunities, what financial assistance is needed, where they live, and what locations in the county they serve.
- Set up a structure/mechanism to assess the unmet demand for certified teachers to deliver universal preschool services over time and to determine whether time-limited waivers of certification requirements are sufficient to allow the available workforce to meet the demand for services. Considerations should include the ability to recruit outside the local public education system and the capacity of local higher education programs to move providers through programs.
- Encourage the public higher education system to explore the possibility of awarding alternative credits that can be counted toward higher education degrees or certification, e.g., credits for providers who have taken early childhood coursework as non-credit courses or credits for experienced providers who have demonstrated competence delivering quality early childhood education services.
- Explore whether to require a time-subscribed commitment to serve in high priority child care settings from providers who receive scholarships or other significant training/credential/education support from Preschool For All funds.